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ABSTRACT

The major difficulty facing the institutionalization of shared responsibility in the Catholic Church, with reference to education, is a lack of awareness that various kinds of decisions must be made, various functions must be performed, and various structures should be established to carry out these functions. The general and comprehensive nature of the responsibility of a pastoral council makes it virtually imperative that there be a division of responsibility and labor between the generalist body, the pastoral council, and a specialist but subsidiary body, the board of education. The essential responsibility and task of a pastoral council, diocesan or parochial, is to give direction to all programs serving pastoral need, to authorize and generally empower such programs, and to demand accountability from them. Any attempt on the part of a pastoral council, however, to exercise control in terms of such particular functions as defining program objectives, selecting policies relating to the program, or monitoring programs (not to mention administering them) represents an inappropriate and unnecessary kind of control. (Author/MLF)

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Achieving Shared Responsibility in the American Church

A

Monograph

By

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Marking the Occasion of the First Presentation
of
The O'Neil D'Amour Award

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Achieving Shared Responsibility in the American Church

It seems that shared responsibility, as an idea and an ideal in the Church, is here to stay, but how it should work remains a problem. The major difficulty facing the institutionalization of shared responsibility, with reference to education, is not a collapse of will to achieve it but a lack of awareness that various kinds of decisions must be made, various functions must be performed, and various structures should be established to carry out these functions. The tendency is to presume that all these functions can or ought to be performed by one organization, namely, the pastoral council.

To be more specific, much of the literature regarding the pastoral council (which was virtually mandated by Vatican II), seems to ignore a fundamental organizational principle, clearly indicated in the conciliar documents; namely, the *principle of subsidiarity*. Thus, one reads in many of the books on parish councils that the proper way for this general, superior, and coordinative structure to relate to subordinate specialized programs, is by the creation of specialized commissions within the council itself. These structures, while authorized to make limited programmatic decisions, are required to submit all major policy questions to the council for approval.[1] The motive for

[1]William J. Rademacher, *Answers for Parish Councils* (Twenty-Third Publications, West Mystic, Conn.)

this primitive organizational arrangement is to assure the council an effective and decisive voice in regulating and directing programs, many of which antedate and thus seem to threaten the council.

The defect in the above arrangement, however, is that by appropriating or reserving to itself a specialized policy role, it takes on a function which, in terms of its coordinative and controlling responsibility, it does not need to, and secondly, which it is not competent to perform. The latter is true especially with reference to programs which are highly institutionalized such as schools, organized charities, and other formal programs.

The difficulty seems to lie in the fact that those who assume leadership in developing a pastoral council sometimes lack an understanding of how the council, a superior body with general coordinative responsibility, can and should carry out its responsibility to a program which is specialized and subordinate and in need of coordination. This lack of understanding is attributable, it seems, to a failure to distinguish the hierarchy of decisions involved properly in every program which purports to serve the needs of a given community; namely, (1) decisions relating to the needs, the philosophy, goals and priorities which reflect the value system(s) of a given community; (2) decisions relating to the objectives which, if sought and served programmatically, will enable the above goals to be realized; (3) decisions relating to policies which design, authorize and enable programs to achieve the desired objectives; and (4) decisions which enable the board, the council, and the community ultimately, to evaluate the programs which serve the community.

There is no escaping the above kinds of decision. They all enter inevitably into any rationally conceived educational management cycle. They may be only implicitly recognized or not at all. And, if this is the case, they will lack the benefit of a clear understanding and of control, of discernable competence and identifiable responsibility. Or, they may be performed all by one agent and, thus, represent a *presumptive concentration* rather than a sharing of responsibility.

If, for example, a pastoral council, assisted perhaps by an educational committee, assumes direct responsibility for all educational programs in the parish or diocese, as the case may be, in effect it assumes responsibility not only for decisions regarding the establishment of goals and the evaluation of

program effectiveness and efficiency, but for decisions regarding the definition of objectives, the selection of policies, and the monitoring of program operation as well.

All of the above kinds of decision, as distinct from the kind of decision which is proper to the administrator, are proper to a representative lay body. However, the general and comprehensive nature of the responsibility of a pastoral council—ranging far beyond educational concerns—makes it virtually imperative that there be a division of responsibility and labor between the generalist body, the pastoral council, and a specialist but subsidiary body, the board of education.

This is true for two reasons: 1) the orderly and efficient operation of the deliberative body itself, the pastoral council, and 2) the orderly and efficient functioning of the administrator.

To require a pastoral council to make all non-administrative decisions in each of the specialized areas over which it may have general responsibility, represents an unnecessary and unreasonable burden on such a body. To require an administrator of a given program—say, education—to relate to a generalist body so burdened, rather than to a specialist and subsidiary body, e.g. a board of education, is to impose an unnecessary and unreasonable communication burden on the administrator who must report the perceived educational needs not to a body which is familiar with educational problems, but to a body which has only a general knowledge of each area of pastoral concern.

The fact is that functions relating to educational goal/priority setting, on the one hand and educational objective and policy selection, on the other, are sufficiently distinct to warrant separate bodies, one general and overseeing, the other specialized and subordinate.

Admittedly the above theoretical argument lacks the support as yet, of empirical evidence. It does have the vindication, however, of a scientific opinion survey conducted by the author in 1975, which reflects the experience of several hundred key role persons involved representatively in the Catholic educational policy process.[2]

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[2]Olin J. Murdick, *A Study of the Policy Process As It Relates to the Catholic Educational Mission at the Local Level* (The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., 1975).

The first concern is to create a representative lay body with responsiblity for all programs, educational and otherwise, which relate to pastoral need. Naturally and properly, the pastoral council needs to exercise pastoral control over all programs serving the Christian community. There is a tendency, however, for newly formed or forming pastoral councils and subsidiary groups to adopt a primitive organizational pattern which gives the pastoral council, a generalist body, direct responsibility over specialized, subordinate bodies such as a board of education.

Admittedly, the essential responsibility and task of a pastoral council, diocesan or parochial, is to give direction to all programs serving pastoral need, to authorize and generally empower such programs, and to demand accountability from them.

These kinds of functions represent a control that is appropriate and sufficient for a pastoral council. Any attempt on the part of a pastoral council, however, to exercise control in terms of such particular functions as defining program objectives, selecting policies relating to program, monitoring programs, not to mention administering them, represents an inappropriate and unnecessary kind of control and one which is destined, in the opinion of this writer, to prove confusing and perhaps dysfunctional to the policy process and to program administration.

Perhaps it would be helpful to illustrate the above principles in terms of some concrete situations.

Establishing goals, pastoral, educational, liturgical, social etc. etc. is a function *proper* to a pastoral council. No other agency or structure in the diocesan or parish community can rightly claim this kind of responsiblity or competence. Other agencies can assist in this effort, and should. But one structure, the pastoral

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Keyrole persons were identified as follows: diocesan superintendents, parish council presidents, pastors, school principals, board of education chairmen and home and school association presidents, all from parishes in which all of the above key roles were functionally evident. Viewed generally, the superintendents as a group gave majority support to the function/role classifications of the survey instrument e.g. the proper functions of a principal, of the parish council, of the board etc., 80 percent of the time. Parish council presidents and pastors were supportive of the above function/role classifications 68 percent of the time. Principals were supportive 64 percent of the time. Board of education chairmen gave majority support 60 percent of the time. And home and school association presidents were supportive of the classifications 56 percent of the time.

council, ought to be in charge of this effort overall, and decisive regarding the outcome.

Reviewing all programs, pastoral, educational, liturgical, social, etc. is *proper* to a pastoral council for the reason that such a function, being general, comprehensive of several areas of interest and competence, and closely related to the value systems of the community, ought to be performed by a structure which is recognized as having this kind of responsibility and competence.

Designing educational programs in detail, on the other hand, would be *improper* to a parish council. Such activity represents a technical and/or professional competence and responsibility not associated, as a rule, with a group of laymen, whether serving on a pastoral council or a board of education. If review of a proposed program by a policy body is called for, the proper body is normally not the pastoral council, which has a general responsibility and mandate, but the board of education which ideally is both representative of the parish and specializes in educational matters.

Reviewing, approving, or vetoing all policies adopted by the board of education—would be *improper* for a pastoral council. Basically, of course, all policies of the board of education are subject to review and possible negatory action by the pastoral council, but this should be in terms of due process such as prior authorization or nonauthorization implied in budget approval or denial and in terms of ultimate evaluation. It would be improper, procedurally, however, for the pastoral council to review every policy decision of the board. The reason, of course, is that such a usurpation of function would represent a violation of the principle of subsidiarity, depriving a lower body, the board of education, of a function which it ought to perform and can.

Requiring the administrator to report directly and regularly to the council concerning his or her administrative decisions —would be *improper* for a parish council because it would represent a usurpation of a function proper to the board of education by whom the administrator is employed and to whom he is directly accountable. This is not to say that the parish council has no right to demand a report, even directly, from the administrator, but this basic right is not properly exercised, as a rule, by demanding regular and direct reports from the administrator.

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Visiting classes, reviewing test results, etc. would represent, as a rule, an *inappropriate* activity for a parish council. This is not to say that the parish council must never attempt to perform a monitoring function. For it is conceivable that a pastoral council, wishing, for example, to verify serious and repeated complaints about the moral or doctrinal integrity of instruction being provided in a given classroom, should want to have firsthand knowledge. To do this as a regular practice, however, ignoring the prerogative of the board of education in this regard, would be contrary to good order.

The above list of activities, some proper and some improper to a pastoral council, are judged to be so in terms of principles indicated at the beginning of this article. Assuming the principles to be correct, that form follows function and that the six functions identified are a necessary part of the educational policy process, what is to be said for the particular structures or forms which have dominated this discussion, namely the pastoral council, the board of education? Are these structures and agencies cast in concrete? Are there not other possible forms? For example, why have a board of education at all? Why not an education committee as part of a parish council?

The answer to the first question, is yes. Theoretically, other forms are possible. The only requirement is that they fit the functions to be performed.

As to the second question concerning the substitution of an education committee for a board, the test is whether a committee which, as a rule, is a mere creature of the parent body, will, indeed, be allowed to perform the functions essential to the formal educational enterprise. These functions, of course, include the defining of educational objectives, the selection of educational policies, and the monitoring of educational programs. Or, if not, by what agency will these functions be performed?

Judging from the existing literature, "education committees", like all committees of the parish council, serve merely to "carry out policies; they do not determine them."[3] This limitation is placed on the education committee in order to preserve for the parish council the prerogative of deciding whether the parish will be able to continue to fund the school or not. Obviously, such a decision, whether to close a school or keep it open,

[3]Rademacher, Ibid., p. 69.

belongs to the parish council rather than to an education committee. But does it follow that the latter should not make other educational policies? There are many policy needs relating to school operation which must be addressed. By whom then, if not the education committee?

The assumption is, apparently, that the parish council itself will assume this responsibility. In effect, then, this very important *generalist* body must take on additional controlling decisions, goals and program and funding priorities and a host of other decisions relative to a subsidiary question concerning the operation of an educational program. Either this, or the school administrator will be left to his or her own devices and policy decisions. It is not enough, in creating a parish council, to declare that it has responsibility for all programs serving the parish. Good order requires that this responsibility be shared in meaningful ways with subsidiary but significantly empowered other bodies, among them a policy making education board or committee.

Shared responsibility, to become effective and credible in the Church, requires a clear recognition of roles and a willingness to trust people in such roles.

Pastoral councils serve best which confine their attention to the determination of the ends to be served (goals and priorities) and the question of whether they have been served (ultimate evaluation) leaving to appropriate subordinate bodies the responsibility for implementive decisions. The sharing of responsibility in the Church involves not simply an enlargement of lay vis-a-vis clerical responsibility, but a sophisticated institutionalized extension of responsibility into the entire Catholic community. In this way only can responsibility be shared in the Christian community. American Catholics need to learn this lesson soon.

APPENDIX

A Model of Educational Decision Making: Identification of Function and Structures*

NEED	SPECIFICATION OF FUNCTIONS	ASSIGNMENT OF FUNCTIONS	RATIONALE
I ENDS	(A) Setting Goals, determining *priorities*		IA1—*Setting Goals* Since all the goals of a parish are basically an expression of that community's needs and, ultimately, its values and philosophy, and since educational goals are integrally related to all other goals of a parish, the proper structure for setting the basic educational goals and priorities is a general broadly representative body/authority such as a pastoral council.
Establishing Ends	1. Articulating the needs of the parish, pastoral, liturgical, social, and establishing goals for the parish of these perceived needs	Pastoral Council	
	2. Setting priorities among goals, approving budgets, thus authorizing and enabling programs to go forward	Pastoral Council	IA2—*Setting Priorities among Goals* Since the setting of priorities among all the goals of a parish is intimately linked with the setting of goals,** it follows that the same agency which sets goals; namely, the parish pastoral council, ought to be charged with the responsibility of setting priorities among goals.

	(B) Defining Objectives 1. Defining educational objectives which will enable the parish to realize its educational goals	Board of Education	IB1—*Defining Educational Objectives* Since the achievement of educational objectives is contingent upon a proper relationship of means to ends and since in serving the hierarchy of ends, the parish pastoral council is able theoretically through mechanisms of budget approval, subsidy regulation and general and ultimate evaluation of program, to satisfy its need to direct, control and hold accountable the board of education, the parish council ought to recognize the right and competence of the board of education to define the educational objectives which it will pursue.
II **MEANS** Framing Means	(A) Selecting *Policies* 1. Formulating policies to guide educational programs	Board of Education	IIA1—*Selecting Educational Policies* Since the integrity of the educational process requires an effective link between educational programs and educational objectives and since well chosen policies provide this link, the selection of policies for a parish educational program ought to be the responsibility of the parish board of education.

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APPENDIX—*Continued*

2. The identification of policy needs in terms of program experience†	**Administrator**	**IIA2**—*Identification of Policy Needs* Since policy needs become manifest largely in terms of program experience (trial, error and success) and since the program administrator is in the best position to observe and to express these needs, it follows that the educational administrator as executive officer of the board of education will as a rule be the principal source of policy needs, not to the exclusion, however, of any initiatives in this regard which the board wishes to take.
3. The making of rules and regulations based on approved policies	**Administrator**	IIA3—*The Making of Administrative Rules* Effective and efficient management requires that the administrator be free to use his professional skill and judgment within the permissible limits indicated/set by board policy, hence the prerogative of making administrative rules belongs to the administrator.

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III MONITORING	(A) Monitoring Program		IIIA1, 2—*The Monitoring of Educational Programs*
Monitoring Program Execution	1. The regular monitoring of educational programs in terms of established policies	Board of Education	Since the monitoring of an educational program on the part of a legislative/ governing body presupposes some of knowledge of the objectives being pursued, the policies being honored and the resources (human and material) being employed, it follows that the board of education which is in a better position, as a rule, to have this knowledge than the pastoral council, ought to perform this function; not to the exclusion, however, of the pastoral council which in terms of its ultimate accountability to the community reserves this right.
	2. Exceptional monitoring, reserved right	Pastoral Council	
IV EVALUATING	(A) Assessing Results		IVA1—*Assessing Program Results*
Assessing and Evaluating Program Achievement with Reference to ends	1. The requiring of reports on school operation, viz. administrative decisions, program operation, student performance and achievement	Board of Education	Program assessment is a comprehensive effort to measure program achievement in relationship to program objectives. Since the board of education is responsible for both defining objectives and for achieving them programmatically it is proper that the board assess its total effort and program outcome as the basis of the evaluation which it and ultimately the parish council will undertake.

APPENDIX—*Continued*

2. The rendering of performance data and other information necessary for evaluating the educational program	Administrator	IVA2—*The Rendering of Performance Data* It is proper that the administrator render performance data so that the board although composed of laymen can carry out its obligations of program assessment and evaluation. Without data there can be no assessment. Without assessment there can be no evaluation and therefore no fulfillment on the part of the board of its responsibility to the community for the educational program.
3. The review of all programs, pastoral, educational, liturgical, social, etc. with reference to the priorities, goals and needs of the parish	Pastoral Council	IVA3—*Evaluating Results* Although the board of education has an obligation and a competence to evaluate programs under its jurisdiction, the ultimate evaluation and comparative of all programs serving the Christian community is the prerogative of that body which provided the basic and original authorization, viz. the parish pastoral council.

*See footnote 2—Murdick.
**The same value judgments involved in setting goals are generally present and operative in setting priorities.
†Not necessarily in this order nor to the exclusion of the board of education's prerogative to initiate policy questions.

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